

ME

"LIBERTY" SIGNALS: MISROUTED, MISREAD

WASHINGTON—A new mystery has been added to questions raised about the Israeli attack June 8 on the U. S. Navy ship *Liberty*—

What happened to messages from the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordering the *Liberty* to move farther away from the Middle Eastern war zone?

A report on the Navy's investigation, made public June 28, made the first mention of the messages. It said:

"Early on the 8th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had issued orders for *Liberty* to move farther from the coast, even though such a move would partially degrade her mission. The messages were misrouted, delayed, and not received until after the attack."

Pentagon officials said an investigation was started to solve the mystery of what happened to the messages. One reason cited for delay: The order went by normal communications instead of through

emergency channels that would have reached the *Liberty* immediately.

The Navy report made these points about the attack in which 34 Americans were killed and 75 wounded:

- The *Liberty* was in international waters, was properly marked and sailing in clear weather.

- Israeli reconnaissance planes had ample opportunity to identify the ship before she was attacked by jet planes and torpedo boats.

Why did the Israelis attack? The Navy's court of inquiry said it had "insufficient information" to judge.

From Israel, however, came this explanation: When the *Liberty* was challenged by an Israeli torpedo boat, it answered with the signal that had been used by Egyptian ships during the 1956 Suez war. Consequently, the *Liberty* was mistaken for an Egyptian ship.